

## Trump and the Korean Peninsula

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Whilst President-elect Donald Trump's plans for East Asia are still largely unknown, his lack of foreign-policy experience and intentions to renegotiate trade and defence deals have led some to suggest that his presidency may contribute to destabilisation across the region, and particularly on the Korean Peninsula. Negative consequences for the Republic of Korea's (ROK) economy, uncertainty over defence and heightened tensions with regards to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are all possible features of the ROK's post-Trump future.

During his election campaign, Trump asserted that he would decrease US defence spending in the ROK and demand a greater ROK contribution to the shared costs of defence against the DPRK threat. With the cost-sharing agreement between the ROK and the US up for renegotiation in 2017, these remarks raise concerns that a Trump presidency will lead to a weakening of the alliance between the two countries and exacerbate instability on the Korean Peninsula.

These tensions are set to arise in the context of wider upheaval of power balances across East Asia, predicated by the prospect of 'trade wars' between the US and China, and Trump's demands that China take a greater role in dealing with the DPRK. While [Trump's first presidential communication with the ROK's President Park](#) was conciliatory in tone ('we are with you all the way and we will not waver'), there is little doubt that Trump's presidency will signify a period of vulnerability and heightened diplomatic tensions for the ROK. These tensions are already visible *within* the country, with Trump's election placing ROK nuclear armament firmly on the agenda. In his election campaign, Trump has suggested that the time has come for both the ROK and Japan to 'defend themselves', using nuclear weapons if necessary. With demands for armament within the ROK emboldened by these comments, the prospect of an Asia-Pacific arms race is not unfeasible.

Another source of uncertainty for the ROK following Trump's election is the possibility of renegotiation of US-ROK trade deals. Exports to the US are a significant part of the ROK's economy, with trade between the US and ROK increasing since their Free Trade Agreement of 2012. South Korean companies are predicting serious losses if Trump's trade protectionism policies are realized, and the country's stock markets initially plunged following Trump's election on 9 November. However the long-term consequences of Trump's election for the ROK will not be clear until time tells how far his election rhetoric is translated into concrete policy. All that is certain at this time is that uncertainty is a daunting prospect for a country already undergoing upheaval due to [domestic political scandal](#) and continuing provocations from the neighbouring DPRK.